

Book Review: Leadership is an Art

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Rezension / review

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Abitew, E. B. (2019). Book Review: Leadership is an Art. [Review of the book *Leadership is an Art*, by M. De Pree]. *Pakistan Administrative Review*, 3(4), 132-135. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-67654-1>

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Book Review

LEADERSHIP IS AN ART

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Book Reviewed: *Leadership Is an Art* by Max De Pree. DOUBLEDAY, Random House Inc. New York. ISBN 0-385-51246-5, 2004. Pages 148.

Reference: Reference to this review should be made as: Abitew, E. B. (2019). Book Review: Leadership is an Art. *Pakistan Administrative Review*, 3(4), 132-135.

In generally speaking, leadership is the process of leading people who are working with us. In order to be successful, every country, corporations or institutions needs good leaders. It is the leaders who show the right direction that the organization wants to go. Therefore, it is possible to say that leaders are the backbones for a country or an institution.

The book of Max De Pree, *Leadership is an Art*, is one of the books on the subject of leadership. I believe that Max has written it well using interesting stories and examples. Since this book has been written in simple and clear language, every reader can understand easily. Regarding the strengths and weakness of the book, I forward my observations as follow.

In the introduction of the book, the author described his book as not a management book as many people describe. In this part of the book, the author briefly described what the book is about and its central idea. Besides, the author told us that the book is not a book of facts or history. Thus, he promised us to explain his book by telling different stories. As the author promised, I found different stories in the entire book. Therefore, I believe that the introduction part of the book has been well written by the author.

In the book's section, the Mill Wright Died, the author of this book acknowledges the very important contribution of Mill Wright for Herman Miller Inc. The importance of recognizing diversity in the work place is the central idea of this part of the book. Therefore, if institutions are in need to be successful, the author suggested a good idea. However, the author of this book did not indicate the negative aspects of the impacts of diversity in the work place.

In what is leadership, one of the parts of the book (see page 11), the author described the concept of leadership from Bible's perspective. However, the author did not come up with what other scholars had to say about leadership. Besides, the author has described the responsibilities of artful leaders as owing assets to their institution, owing to include people, owing certain maturity, responsible for effectiveness and responsible for future leadership.

In participative a premise which is one of the parts of the book (see page 23), author described participative management as the most effective management process in the contemporary world. Even though, participative management is important in bringing transparency, it may not always

be appropriate; we have to use it depending on the circumstances. Often we find it difficult to turn our ideas and relationships into reality. To solve this problem, Max proposed five steps to turn our ideas and relationships into reality. The five steps include: respecting people by understanding their diversified gifts, understand that what we believe precedes policy and practice, agree on the rights of work, understand the role and relationship we play in our agreements and covenants, and understand that our relationships count more than structure. I found these steps, proposed by the author, as best points to turn our ideas and relationships in to the reality.

In Theory Fastball (see page 31) which is one of the sections of the book, the author sets out or draws eight essential ground rules for working a job, based on the baseball game. In baseball game, if any one of us is to catch someone's fastball, there must be a mitt. Like this, the eight essential ground rules proposed by the author are important in working process. The ground rules include: the right to be needed; the right to be involved; the right to be covenantal relationship, the right to be understand, the right to affect one's own destiny; the right to be accountable; the right to appeal; and the right to make a commitment. The rights of work make a sort of mitt. Therefore, I found these ground rules very important in the working process.

In one of the sections of the book, Roving Leadership (see page 45), the author has described the importance of roving leadership based on the story created in one church during Eastern Sunday morning. In any organization, there are two kinds of leaders- hierarchical leaders and roving leaders. Hierarchical leaders are leaders who are solving problems through hierarchy of the organization. While roving leaders are leaders who are solving problems without following hierarchy of the organization. In this part of the book, the author gave due emphasis to the role of roving leadership in organizations. The significance of roving leadership in organizations has been described by the author as a vehicle to reach our potential. However, the author did not portray the consequences of exercising leadership without following organization's hierarchy.

Intimacy is another part of the book (see page 53). In this part of the book, the importance of intimacy has described. The author of the book has described intimacy as the secret of success for Herman Miller. As stated by the book's author, there are two kinds of relationship- the contractual and covenantal relationship. Not the contractual relationship but the covenantal relationship is helping us to reach our potential. Thus, I agree with the author that intimacy is indispensable while exercising leadership.

In Whither Capitalism which is one of the parts of the book, the author criticized the capitalism system as an exclusive approach. Because of this, the author proposed the inclusive approach (including normal human problems in the system) in the capitalist system to fulfill potentials in institutions. In this part of the book, the author gave due emphasis the importance of inclusive approach in the leadership process. Even though the author proposed the inclusive approach in leadership process, he did not sure about its effectiveness in practice.

In giant tales which is one of the parts of the book, the author tell us about giants (engineers, model makers, department supervisors) who contributed a lot for the success of the Herman Miller in different times. The author has described giants as: give others the gift of space; see opportunities where others see trouble; catch fastball; have special gifts; and enable others to express their own gifts. Despite this, it is better if the author indicates us the ways to become giants.

In tribal storytelling (see page 81), which is another part of the book; the author tells us the history of tribes in Nigeria. When the electricity was brought to the Nigerian tribe, the customary night time gatherings by the tribal fire were replaced by light-bulb. Because of the absence of

tribal storytellers, these tribes lose their values. The author has also described the stock of values (shared ideas, shared goals, integrity, and quality) in Herman Miller. Thus, I agree with the author's idea that every family or institution needs tribal storytellers to preserve and to make it continuous.

In the section of the book, who owns this place, the author described three categories of ownership in the American corporation. The author stated that in Herman Miller there is an owner and an employee in every position because everybody acts sometimes as employee and sometimes as owners. In Herman Miller, employees are both employees and owners by being stock shareholders. Due to this, participative management was exercising in the company. As noted by the author even if many employees occupy position, they do not have the sense of ownership because of this it is difficult to make the capitalist system better. However, it is possible to make employees to feel sense of ownership in organizations through creating conducive working environment.

In communicate (see page 101), one of the parts of the book, the author give due emphasis to the role of good communication in organizations. Just as tools do things, communication also serves as a tool in organization to convey and preserve organization's vision. Therefore, communication skills are the most trusted and familiar tools for leaders. Despite this, the author has nothing to say about the ways to be become good communicator and barriers hindering good commendation.

In the pink ice in the urinal (see page 109), the author has raised important point: what do you understand if you see the sign of pink ice in your urine? Such signal in your urine shows you that something is wrong; something become deteriorating; therefore you have to do something. Like this, leaders in the organization need to recognize the signals of impeding deterioration and they should get ready to take measures. So I express my appreciation to Max.

What is next is another part of the book. In this part of the book, the author gave due emphasis to how and when the performance of leaders is reviewing. As he described, reviewing the performance of leaders is not easy as reviewing the performance of ordinary employees. Since the jobs of leaders are not black-and white, their performance cannot be measured easily. Since leaders are liable for what happens in the future rather than what is happening day-to-day, their performance must be examined over long period of time. To sum up, in this part of the book, the author raised important point on reviewing the performance of leaders.

In one of the parts of the book (some thoughts for CEOs who build buildings), the author described that not only the management environment but also the physical environment also matters in the corporations or institutions. Like countries reflect their culture in their buildings, the facilities that we use will reflect the context of a corporation, its leadership and its value. For instance, when we see the buildings of St. Lalibela and Emperor of Atse Tewodero here in Ethiopia, we understand the level of civilization during these regimes. Therefore, I agreed with the author that physical buildings and facilities should matter in our corporations and architectures should indicate the cultures and values and leadership of the corporation while build buildings.

To make some vice president (see page 129), is another part of the book. In this part of the book, the author described that choosing leaders is the most vital and important matter corporations and institutions face. The difficulty and the necessary traits for choosing leaders also described in this part of the book. The author has listed the characteristics or traits of leaders. However, the universality of these traits is questionable because all leaders do not possess the same characteristics. In my opinion, different circumstance require leaders with unique traits.

Why should I weep is another part of the book (see page 135). In this part of the book, the author raised different issues like the reason why people weep. Besides, the author suspect on individuals not weep because these people are not intimate with their work, they have no covenant with their group. However, even though, people weep on good or bad things, I believe that weeping is not always necessary.

In the marks of elegance, which is one of the parts of the book, the author has emphasized on the difficulty of knowing the wholeness of some person or something only through seeing parts. At the office or in plant, we see only sides of people but the parts of people we see at work may give us little idea of about their completeness. This is because the short-term look at some person or something and judge its wholeness lead to the missing of crucial element. In this part of the book, the author described that elegant leaders always reach for completeness. However, in my opinion, it is difficult to know the inside of people, which is the most difficult part to know or understand.